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Collective Anxiety and Large-Group Psychology in Times of Global Uncertainty

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary global landscape marked by pandemics, wars, economic instability, climate anxiety, and rapid technological transformation, uncertainty has ceased to be a temporary condition and has become a permanent psychological environment. This study examines collective anxiety as a large-group phenomenon, conceptualizing it not merely as the aggregation of individual fears but as an emergent psychosocial field shaped by shared narratives, symbolic threats, and unconscious group processes. Drawing on large-group psychology (Volkan), social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner), terror management theory (Greenberg et al.), and uncertainty-intolerance models (Carleton), the article argues that global uncertainty destabilizes collective meaning systems and reactivates archaic group defenses such as splitting, projection, idealization, and the construction of chosen traumas and chosen enemies.

The paper further proposes that collective anxiety operates through narrative contagion, media amplification, and affective synchronization, producing transindividual emotional climates that influence political behavior, moral polarization, and intergroup hostility. At the same time, the study explores conditions under which collective anxiety may be transformed into collective resilience through meaning-making, symbolic integration, and the reconstruction of shared future imaginaries. By integrating clinical psychoanalytic perspectives with social psychology and cultural trauma theory, this article develops a multidimensional model of how large groups psychologically respond to chronic uncertainty, highlighting the fragile boundary between social cohesion and mass regression in the age of global instability.

Keywords: collective anxiety, large-group psychology, global uncertainty, social identity, terror management, chosen trauma, narrative contagion, resilience

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1. Introduction

The early twenty-first century is increasingly defined by a persistent condition of global uncertainty. Pandemics, geopolitical conflicts, economic volatility, climate crisis, mass migration, and the acceleration of digital technologies have collectively transformed uncertainty from a temporary disruption into a permanent psychological environment. Under such conditions, anxiety ceases to be solely an individual affective response and becomes a shared emotional atmosphere that permeates social life. This phenomenon may be conceptualized as collective anxiety: a transindividual emotional field in which fear, threat anticipation, and loss of predictability are socially synchronized and symbolically organized.

Classical psychology has long treated anxiety primarily as an intrapsychic or interpersonal phenomenon. However, large-scale crises reveal that anxiety can also operate at the level of groups, nations, and civilizations. Freud (1921/1955), in Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, already observed that individuals in groups undergo regression, heightened suggestibility, and emotional contagion, leading to the amplification of primitive affects. Later, Bion (1961) demonstrated that groups under threat tend to shift from task-oriented functioning to basic assumption states dominated by dependency, fight-flight, and messianic hope, all of which are structured by unconscious anxiety.

Building on these foundations, Volkan (2001, 2017) introduced the concept of large-group psychology, emphasizing that ethnic, national, and religious groups develop shared mental representations, chosen traumas, and chosen glories that organize collective identity across generations. According to Volkan (2017),

“When a large group feels its identity is threatened, its members react not only with realistic concern but with the reactivation of archaic defensive operations such as splitting, projection, and the search for external enemies” (p. 3).

In the context of global uncertainty, such processes become intensified, as the future loses symbolic stability and collective meaning systems are destabilized.

From a social-cognitive perspective, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) posits that individuals derive a significant portion of their self-concept from group memberships. Threats to the group are therefore experienced as threats to the self, eliciting anxiety, in-group favoritism, and out-group derogation. Empirical studies show that under conditions of uncertainty, individuals increasingly rely on group identities to restore a sense of coherence and predictability (Hogg, 2007). Hogg (2007) notes that

“Self-uncertainty is aversive, and people are motivated to reduce it by identifying with groups that provide clear norms, prototypes, and boundaries” (p. 78).

This motivational dynamic links personal anxiety to collective polarization.

Terror Management Theory (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986) further elucidates how existential anxiety, particularly the awareness of mortality, is managed through cultural worldviews and in-group identification. When death-related uncertainty becomes salient—as in pandemics or wars—individuals defensively intensify their attachment to symbolic systems that promise meaning, continuity, and immortality, often accompanied by hostility toward those who threaten these systems (Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg, 2015).

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In parallel, contemporary clinical research on intolerance of uncertainty demonstrates that ambiguity and unpredictability function as core generators of anxiety (Carleton, 2016). While this literature focuses primarily on individual psychopathology, its implications extend to the collective level. When entire societies are exposed to chronic uncertainty, the same cognitive-affective mechanisms—hypervigilance, catastrophic anticipation, and compulsive meaning-seeking—operate within shared narratives and media ecosystems, producing what may be termed narrative contagion (Garcia & Rimé, 2019).

Cultural trauma theory adds another layer by emphasizing that collective anxiety is organized through symbolic interpretation rather than mere exposure to events. Alexander et al. (2004) argue that a social group becomes traumatized not simply because it suffers, but because it comes to define its suffering as a fundamental threat to its identity and future. Such narratives of threat, loss, and injustice become emotionally charged memory structures that shape political attitudes, moral boundaries, and intergroup relations.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that collective anxiety in times of global uncertainty is not the sum of individual fears but an emergent psychosocial configuration. It is produced through the interaction of existential threat, identity processes, unconscious group dynamics, and media-mediated affective synchronization. This study therefore aims to conceptualize collective anxiety as a large-group phenomenon, examining its psychological mechanisms, its potential for social regression, and the conditions under which it may be transformed into collective resilience.

In the following sections, the article will (a) outline the theoretical foundations of large-group anxiety, (b) analyze the mechanisms through which uncertainty is converted into shared fear and polarization, and (c) explore pathways toward symbolic integration and resilience that may enable societies to endure chronic unpredictability without descending into mass regression or destructive intergroup conflict.

2. Theoretical Framework: Large-Group Anxiety and the Psychology of Uncertainty

2.1. Large-Group Psychology and Unconscious Regression

Large-group psychology refers to the study of psychological processes that emerge when individuals experience themselves primarily as members of an ethnic, national, religious, or ideological collective (Volkan, 2001, 2017). In such contexts, personal identity becomes partially submerged within a shared symbolic self, and unconscious dynamics shape emotional reactions, perception of threat, and political behavior. Freud (1921/1955) argued that group formation entails a regression to earlier modes of psychic functioning, characterized by diminished ego boundaries, heightened suggestibility, and the dominance of affect over rational judgment.

Bion's (1961) theory of basic assumption groups further demonstrated that under conditions of anxiety, groups abandon reality-oriented thinking and shift into primitive emotional states organized around dependency, fight–flight, or messianic expectation. These states function as collective defenses against uncertainty and helplessness. Bion (1961) observed that:

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"The individual in the group becomes dominated by emotional forces that are archaic, irrational, and resistant to reality-testing" (p. 146).

In periods of global instability, such regression is not confined to small groups but extends to entire societies, producing large-scale polarization, conspiracy thinking, and apocalyptic imaginaries.

Volkan (2017) conceptualizes this phenomenon as the reactivation of chosen traumas—shared historical wounds that become emotionally recharged when a group perceives its identity to be under existential threat. These traumas serve as reservoirs of unprocessed grief and humiliation, structuring collective memory and mobilizing defensive aggression. The large group, faced with uncertainty, seeks psychological containment by reasserting rigid boundaries between "us" and "them," thereby transforming diffuse anxiety into morally organized hostility.

2.2. Social Identity, Uncertainty Reduction, and Group Polarization

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) posits that individuals derive self-esteem and meaning from group memberships. When personal or societal uncertainty increases, identification with salient in-groups intensifies as a compensatory mechanism. Hogg's (2007) Uncertainty–Identity Theory extends this model by arguing that:

"People are motivated to identify with groups that reduce subjective uncertainty about who they are and how they should behave" (p. 79).

In conditions of global unpredictability, ideological and national groups offering clear norms, rigid boundaries, and simplified worldviews become especially attractive. Empirical research shows that uncertainty heightens conformity to group prototypes and increases hostility toward deviant or out-group members (Hogg, 2014). This dynamic explains why collective anxiety often manifests as moral absolutism, radicalization, and the sacralization of group narratives.

Such processes are further amplified by affective polarization. Iyengar et al. (2019) demonstrate that contemporary societies exhibit not merely ideological disagreement but deep emotional animosity between groups, fueled by perceived existential threats. Collective anxiety thus becomes a binding emotional force that solidifies in-group cohesion while legitimizing out-group exclusion.

2.3. Terror Management and Existential Threat

Terror Management Theory (TMT) provides a crucial link between uncertainty, mortality awareness, and group-based defense. According to Greenberg et al. (1986), the awareness of death generates potentially paralyzing anxiety, which is managed through adherence to cultural worldviews and self-esteem derived from group belonging. When mortality salience is heightened—as during pandemics, wars, or ecological crises—individuals intensify their commitment to symbolic systems that promise meaning and continuity beyond individual existence.

Experimental studies consistently show that reminders of death increase in-group favoritism and punitive attitudes toward out-groups (Pyszczynski et al., 2015). This suggests that collective anxiety is not only about material insecurity but also about existential annihilation. Global uncertainty, by making the fragility of life and civilization salient, activates deep defensive structures that operate at both individual and collective levels.

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2.4. Intolerance of Uncertainty and Affective Synchronization

Clinical research identifies intolerance of uncertainty as a core cognitive vulnerability underlying anxiety disorders (Carleton, 2016). At the societal level, this intolerance is mirrored in collective reactions to ambiguous threats. Media environments characterized by continuous crisis reporting, algorithmic amplification of fear, and rapid emotional contagion create what Rimé (2009) terms social sharing of emotion, a process through which affect becomes synchronized across large populations.

Garcia and Rimé (2019) show that emotionally charged narratives spread faster and more widely than neutral information, producing collective mood states that persist beyond the original events. Under such conditions, uncertainty is transformed into a shared emotional climate, reinforcing vigilance, suspicion, and catastrophic anticipation. The group, much like the anxious individual, becomes preoccupied with threat monitoring and meaning closure.

2.5. Cultural Trauma and Symbolic Organization of Fear

Cultural trauma theory emphasizes that collective anxiety is mediated by narrative and symbolism rather than direct exposure alone. Alexander et al. (2004) argue that a social group becomes traumatized when it interprets an event as a fundamental violation of its identity and moral order. Such interpretations are constructed through political discourse, media representation, and collective memory.

Eyerman (2019) notes that trauma narratives serve both to organize suffering and to mobilize collective action, but they can also entrench victimhood and perpetuate cycles of fear and resentment. In times of global uncertainty, competing trauma narratives may clash, each claiming existential legitimacy, thereby intensifying intergroup polarization and emotional escalation.

3. Mechanisms of Collective Anxiety in Times of Global Uncertainty

3.1. Narrative Contagion and Media Amplification

Collective anxiety does not spread merely through direct experiences of threat; rather, it is primarily mediated symbolically. In contemporary societies, mass media and digital platforms function as affective transmission systems in which fear, anger, and anticipations of catastrophe circulate with unprecedented speed and intensity.

Emotional contagion theory suggests that individuals automatically synchronize their affective states with those of others through mimicry, identification, and shared attention (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994). When such synchronization is technologically amplified, it produces what may be termed narrative contagion: the rapid diffusion of emotionally charged stories that organize collective perception around danger and loss of control.

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Rimé (2009) demonstrates that after collective stressors, individuals engage in extensive social sharing of emotion, seeking validation, meaning, and symbolic containment. However, in digital ecosystems governed by algorithmic selection, narratives that evoke fear and outrage are disproportionately circulated, creating what Garcia and Rimé (2019) describe as "emotional cascades." These cascades generate transindividual mood states in which uncertainty is framed as imminent catastrophe, thereby intensifying vigilance and reducing tolerance for ambiguity.

The psychological consequence is a collective form of hyperarousal analogous to individual anxiety disorders. Grupe and Nitschke (2013) show that uncertainty activates anticipatory threat systems in the brain; when such activation is continuously reinforced through media narratives, societies may enter a state of chronic affective mobilization, oscillating between panic, moral outrage, and apocalyptic expectation.

3.2. Projection, Splitting, and the Construction of Enemies

From a psychoanalytic group perspective, collective anxiety is metabolized through primitive defense mechanisms. Klein's (1946/1975) concepts of splitting and projection describe how intolerable internal states are expelled and located in external objects. In large groups under threat, these mechanisms operate symbolically: diffuse anxiety is transformed into concrete images of enemies, traitors, or conspiratorial forces.

Volkan (2017) argues that large groups under identity threat externalize their sense of vulnerability by constructing "suitable targets" for projection, thereby converting amorphous fear into morally organized hostility. He notes:

"Large-group regression leads to a simplification of the world into good and bad objects, with the bad object carrying the group's disavowed helplessness and rage" (Volkan, 2017, p. 41).

This process explains why periods of global uncertainty are often accompanied by the rise of scapegoating, xenophobia, and ideological demonization. The enemy functions as a container for anxiety, allowing the group to preserve an illusion of coherence and control.

3.3. Chosen Traumas and Transgenerational Reactivation

Collective anxiety rarely emerges in a historical vacuum. Volkan's (2001) concept of chosen trauma refers to shared mental representations of past humiliations, losses, or defeats that remain emotionally unresolved and are transmitted across generations. When present circumstances evoke feelings of vulnerability or unpredictability, these dormant trauma memories are reactivated and infused with contemporary meaning.

Such reactivation produces a temporal collapse in which past and present fuse, intensifying emotional responses beyond what current events alone would justify. Eyerman (2019) emphasizes that trauma narratives provide a symbolic grammar through which groups interpret new threats, often framing them as repetitions of historical injustice. This dynamic amplifies collective anxiety by situating uncertainty within a mytho-historical continuum of persecution and survival.

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3.4. Emotional Synchronization and Mass Regression

Bion's (1961) notion of basic assumption functioning helps explain how large groups under anxiety shift from rational deliberation to emotionally driven modes of relating. In mass contexts, individuals surrender aspects of autonomous judgment and become attuned to the dominant affective tone of the group. This process of emotional synchronization creates what Durkheim (1912/1995) described as collective effervescence, which, under threat conditions, takes the form of collective fear rather than sacred exaltation.

Neuroscientific research on social synchrony indicates that shared emotional experiences lead to alignment of neural and physiological states (Konvalinka et al., 2011). At the societal level, this alignment can produce waves of panic, moral outrage, or messianic hope that override critical reflection. The group, in a regressed state, seeks omnipotent leaders, absolute explanations, and symbolic certainties to counteract the unbearable openness of the future.

3.5. Moral Polarization and Affective Boundaries

Collective anxiety also restructures moral perception. According to Terror Management Theory, existential threat intensifies adherence to cultural worldviews and increases hostility toward those who challenge them (Greenberg et al., 1986; Pyszczynski et al., 2015). Under mortality salience, individuals defend their symbolic universes by rigidifying moral boundaries, leading to what Haidt (2012) calls moral polarization: the division of the social world into morally pure in-groups and corrupt out-groups.

This polarization is not merely cognitive but deeply affective. Iyengar et al. (2019) demonstrate that contemporary political conflict is driven less by policy disagreement than by emotional animosity and identity-based fear. Collective anxiety thus becomes institutionalized in social discourse, law, and political mobilization, shaping not only how groups feel but how they define justice, loyalty, and threat.

4. Pathological and Resilient Collective Responses to Global Uncertainty

4.1. Mass Regression and the Collapse of Symbolic Mediation

When collective anxiety reaches a critical threshold, large groups may undergo what psychoanalytic theory describes as mass regression. In this state, higher-order symbolic functions—such as reflective judgment, tolerance of ambivalence, and narrative complexity—are replaced by primitive modes of thinking organized around immediacy, concreteness, and affective discharge. Freud (1921/1955) observed that in groups, the ego's capacity for reality-testing weakens, while identification with an idealized leader or ideology intensifies, producing a suspension of critical faculties.

Bion's (1961) concept of basic assumption functioning clarifies how anxiety disrupts the group's capacity for symbolic mediation. Under high uncertainty, groups abandon task-oriented thinking and regress into emotional survival modes, such as fight–flight or dependency.

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In such states, complexity becomes intolerable, and ambiguity is experienced as a threat rather than a condition to be mentally processed. The symbolic space in which conflicting meanings can coexist collapses, giving way to rigid dichotomies and absolutist interpretations.

This regression has direct implications for public discourse. Nuanced causal explanations are replaced by conspiracy narratives, apocalyptic scenarios, or moralized simplifications. The social field becomes saturated with what Lacan (1966/2006) termed imaginary certainty: emotionally convincing but epistemically fragile constructions that promise immediate coherence in the face of indeterminacy. Collective anxiety thus erodes the cultural capacity for symbolic elaboration and replaces it with affect-driven certitude.

4.2. Authoritarian Attraction and the Search for Externalized Control

One of the most robust empirical findings in political psychology is the link between perceived threat, uncertainty, and authoritarian attitudes. Adorno et al. (1950) already demonstrated that individuals exposed to chronic insecurity exhibit increased submission to authority, intolerance of ambiguity, and punitive orientation toward out-groups. More recent studies confirm that uncertainty heightens preference for strong leaders who promise order, predictability, and clear boundaries (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003).

From a large-group perspective, authoritarian attraction functions as a collective defense against the unbearable experience of helplessness. By idealizing a leader or a rigid ideological system, the group externalizes control and symbolically restores coherence. Hogg (2014) notes that under uncertainty, individuals gravitate toward prototypical leaders who embody the group's identity in a simplified and absolutized form. Such leaders become containers for collective anxiety, absorbing projections of omnipotence and certainty.

This process is not merely political but psychological. The surrender of individual judgment in favor of authoritarian structures represents a regression from symbolic autonomy to dependency. It provides emotional relief at the cost of cognitive and moral complexity. In this sense, authoritarianism can be understood as a large-scale defense mechanism against the disorganizing effects of global uncertainty.

4.3. Moral Absolutization and the Intolerance of Ambivalence

Another pathological response to collective anxiety is the radicalization of moral boundaries. Under conditions of threat, groups exhibit a marked reduction in tolerance for ambivalence and moral pluralism. Terror Management Theory demonstrates that mortality salience intensifies adherence to cultural worldviews and increases derogation of those who challenge them (Pyszczynski et al., 2015). This dynamic transforms uncertainty into moral urgency: the world is divided into forces of good and evil, truth and corruption, loyalty and betrayal.

Haidt (2012) argues that moral emotions, particularly disgust and fear, play a central role in the formation of rigid ideological camps. When collective anxiety is high, these emotions are easily mobilized, leading to what can be described as affective moralization: political and social disagreements become charged with existential significance, and compromise is experienced as betrayal. The psychological function of this process is to restore a sense of certainty by collapsing complexity into emotionally saturated moral categories.

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4.4. Collective Resilience as Symbolic and Institutional Containment

In contrast to regressive responses, some societies develop forms of collective resilience that enable them to tolerate uncertainty without disintegrating into mass anxiety or authoritarian closure. Research on community resilience emphasizes the role of shared narratives, institutional trust, and symbolic resources in buffering the psychological impact of crisis (Norris et al., 2008). Such resilience does not eliminate fear but organizes it within frameworks of meaning that preserve temporal continuity and social cohesion.

At the symbolic level, resilient groups maintain narrative structures that can integrate loss, unpredictability, and conflict without collapsing into totalizing explanations. Alexander (2012) notes that societies capable of processing trauma through open public discourse and pluralistic memory work are less prone to polarization and scapegoating. Symbolic containment allows anxiety to be articulated, debated, and transformed rather than projected and acted out.

At the institutional level, transparent governance, credible information systems, and inclusive political processes reduce the subjective experience of uncontrollability. Psychological research indicates that perceived procedural justice and trust in institutions significantly mitigate collective fear and aggression during crises (Tyler, 2006). Such structures function as external regulators that stabilize the group's sense of continuity and predictability.

4.5. Affective Regulation and the Preservation of Reflective Space

Finally, resilient collective responses depend on the preservation of what may be termed reflective space: the cultural and psychological capacity to hold anxiety without immediate discharge into action or ideology. Fonagy et al. (2002) describe mentalization as the ability to understand behavior in terms of underlying mental states; at the collective level, an analogous function allows societies to interpret fear, anger, and uncertainty as psychological signals rather than as direct imperatives for retaliation or exclusion.

When reflective space is maintained, collective anxiety can be processed through dialogue, cultural production, and symbolic ritualization. Art, literature, and public commemorations often serve this function, transforming raw affect into shared representations that can be contemplated rather than acted out. In this way, anxiety becomes a source of collective self-reflection rather than a trigger for mass regression.

5. Discussion: Collective Anxiety as a Structural Condition of Late Modernity

The analyses presented in the previous sections indicate that collective anxiety in times of global uncertainty is not an episodic emotional reaction but a structural psychosocial condition. It emerges at the intersection of existential threat, identity insecurity, unconscious group dynamics, and media-driven affective synchronization. Rather than being reducible to the aggregation of individual anxieties, it constitutes a transindividual emotional field that reorganizes perception, morality, and political behavior.

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From the perspective of large-group psychology, uncertainty weakens symbolic mediation and activates archaic defensive operations. Freud's (1921/1955) observation that groups under emotional pressure regress to primitive modes of identification is corroborated by Bion's (1961) findings that anxiety shifts groups from reality-oriented thinking to basic assumption states. In contemporary societies, this regression is magnified by digital communication systems that collapse temporal distance, intensify emotional contagion, and reward simplification over reflection (Rimé, 2009; Garcia & Rimé, 2019).

Social Identity Theory and Uncertainty–Identity Theory further clarify why collective anxiety tends to crystallize into polarization. When subjective and societal uncertainty increase, individuals seek epistemic closure and self-definition through rigid group identifications (Hogg, 2007, 2014). This process transforms diffuse anxiety into structured intergroup antagonism. Out-groups become repositories for projected threat, while in-groups are idealized as sources of certainty and moral purity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Terror Management Theory deepens this interpretation by demonstrating that existential insecurity, particularly mortality salience, intensifies the defense of cultural worldviews and heightens hostility toward symbolic challengers (Greenberg et al., 1986; Pyszczynski et al., 2015). In periods of pandemic, war, or ecological crisis, the fragility of life and social order becomes salient at a collective level, thereby activating large-scale defensive structures organized around absolutist meaning systems.

Cultural trauma theory shows that these reactions are not merely spontaneous but narratively organized. Societies interpret uncertainty through historically sedimented memory structures, chosen traumas, and moral scripts that define who is threatened, who is guilty, and who is entitled to protection (Alexander et al., 2004; Eyerman, 2019). Collective anxiety is thus mediated by storytelling, commemoration, and political discourse, which can either amplify regression or facilitate symbolic integration.

The crucial theoretical implication is that collective anxiety reflects a breakdown in what may be termed symbolic containment. When institutions, narratives, and cultural practices fail to provide credible frameworks for interpreting unpredictability, large groups revert to emotionally saturated, cognitively simplified, and morally polarized modes of functioning. This breakdown manifests in conspiracy thinking, authoritarian attraction, and the erosion of deliberative public space (Jost et al., 2003; Hogg, 2014).

Yet the same mechanisms that generate collective anxiety also point toward conditions of collective resilience. Research on community and societal resilience emphasizes that uncertainty becomes psychologically tolerable when it is embedded in trustworthy institutions, pluralistic narratives, and reflective communicative spaces (Norris et al., 2008; Tyler, 2006). Symbolic resources that allow ambivalence, temporal continuity, and moral complexity serve as buffers against mass regression.

From a psychodynamic perspective, resilience at the large-group level depends on the preservation of mentalization and reflective capacity. Fonagy et al. (2002) show that the ability to interpret emotional states rather than act them out is central to psychological stability; analogously, societies that can represent fear, loss, and anger symbolically—through public discourse, cultural production, and institutional mediation—are less prone to projective hostility and authoritarian closure.

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6. Conclusion

This study has conceptualized collective anxiety as a large-group psychological phenomenon emerging under conditions of chronic global uncertainty. Integrating psychoanalytic group theory, social identity approaches, terror management theory, intolerance of uncertainty research, and cultural trauma studies, it has argued that collective anxiety is not merely an emotional response but a structural reorganization of symbolic, moral, and political life.

The loss of predictability destabilizes individual and collective identity, weakens symbolic mediation, and activates archaic defensive mechanisms such as splitting, projection, and idealization. These processes are amplified by media-driven emotional contagion and by historical trauma narratives that provide ready-made frameworks for interpreting threat. As a result, societies may regress toward moral absolutism, authoritarian dependency, and polarized worldviews.

At the same time, the analysis demonstrates that collective anxiety is not inevitably pathological. Its trajectory depends on the availability of symbolic containment, institutional trust, and reflective public spaces. Where uncertainty can be narratively integrated, morally complexified, and institutionally regulated, large groups are capable of sustaining cohesion without resorting to regression or scapegoating.

Theoretically, the findings suggest that global uncertainty should be treated not as an external stressor acting upon otherwise stable social systems, but as a constitutive condition of late modern subjectivity and collective life. Psychologically, this implies that resilience in the twenty-first century is less a matter of restoring lost certainties than of cultivating cultural and institutional capacities to live with indeterminacy without disintegration.

Future research may extend this framework empirically by examining how different societies symbolically process uncertainty, how media ecologies shape affective synchronization, and how institutional legitimacy moderates the transformation of collective anxiety into either mass regression or adaptive cohesion. In this way, large-group psychology offers a crucial lens for understanding the emotional foundations of political and cultural dynamics in an age where uncertainty has become a permanent horizon rather than an exceptional condition.

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